

Book Reviews

My Mother Wears Combat Boots: A Parenting Guide for the Rest of Us

Jessica Mills.
Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2007.

Reviewed by Jessica Smartt Gullion

Punk mama Jessica Mills was tired of stereotypical pregnancy and parenting books, so, in true do-it-yourself fashion, she wrote her own guidebook. The result, *My Mother Wears Combat Boots: A Parenting Guide for the Rest of Us*, offers an alternative to mainstream parenting guides. Through personal narrative, accompanied by sidebars of helpful tips and information, Mills offers a different approach for advice-seeking parents.

While the technical information she provides is adequate, Mills's strength lies in the personal accounts of her own parenting experiences. Her writing is raw and honest, a refreshing change from the current proliferation of ironic "bad mommy" memoirs.

Mills covers a range of topics, from the nuts and bolts of pregnancy, birth, and early childhood, to the more difficult topics of finding a community of like-minded parents, resisting gender-coding, and unschooling. Individual ideals are reflected in a personal approach to childrearing, and the best part of Mills's narrative is her discussion of how she incorporates anarchist ideals in raising her daughter.

Subculture parents may find themselves alone when the majority of their peers are not having children. Mills shares her experience of forming a supportive community of like-minded parents. With a group of subculture parents, Mills organized a cooperative childcare centre that reflected their personal philosophies. She includes a do-it-yourself guide to forming such a cooperative centre and shares some of the materials used in her school. She also provides interviews with other punk mamas who incorporate punk sensibilities in their childrearing.

Mills advocates involving children in our own political activism and using our ideals to create a better world for our children. She writes, "Parenting is

living a life of daily revolution.” The revolutionary ideas supported by anarchists can be reflected in how we choose to parent our children. As anarchists, we can follow the dominant childrearing practices, or we can choose to maintain our passion for social change and work to create the kind of world we want for our children.

Parenting a Defiant Child: A Sanity Saving Guide to Finally Stopping the Bad Behavior

Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall.
New York: American Management Association, 2007.

Reviewed by Tatjana Takševa Chorney

This guidebook offers step-by-step techniques and skills that will enable parents to transform their confrontational relationship with a defiant child. Written in jargon-free prose, the book includes key statements and concepts in highlighted boxes, which makes it a particularly accessible work. It aims to distinguish itself from other parenting books by favouring a preventative over a punitive approach to non-compliant behaviour. I support the premise that prevention works better than punitive measures, which focus on consequences rather than causes.

The book is divided into three sections: Prevention, Managing Non-compliance and Defiance, and Planning for Success in the Community. Each section emphasizes practical concerns, and the end of each chapter includes a section entitled Applications. The three sections are organized in a linear and sequential way, and provide parents with exercises, examples, and activities that will help them implement the ideas and proposals presented in the preceding chapter. As authors Philip S. Hall and Nancy D. Hall rightly point out, “there is no one big thing”(x) that a parent can do to solve the problem of defiance in children. Solutions come from consistently following a series of small steps and actions that will eventually modify undesirable behaviour.

The authors define defiant behaviour in descriptive rather than summative terms. They pose five questions for parents to answer: “Does my child frequently provoke other people? Does my child intentionally defy me? Does my child maliciously antagonize and fight with his or her sibling? Does my child throw a temper tantrum when he doesn’t get his way? Do I let my child get away with things so that I can have some peace and quiet?” (ix). If parents answer “yes” to two or more of these questions, and the defiant child is older than three years of age, then it is time for action. The authors do not say, however, that a child’s defiance is often a justifiable reaction to a set of circumstances that may have been exacerbated by parents’ momentary or ongoing lack of insight, patience, or energy.